

The Impactful Academic: Relational Management Education as an Intervention for Impact

Abstract

We widen the scope of the impact debate by extending Boyer's theorization of scholarship through Denyer et al's CIMO framework to propose relational management education as an intervention that creates the generative mechanism of co-production and impact. In so doing, we propose a new conceptualization of academic impact that occurs through teaching and is situated within a community of inquirers. This contrasts current thinking that sees the research paper as the most appropriate unit of analysis to measure the excellence and impact of research. By examining the notion of the gap between academics and practitioners, we argue that the impact agenda should be widened to include a consideration of how management academics can become impactful through their teaching of practitioners, broadly defined to include the whole range of learners associated with business schools. We propose that for management research to have the potential to change practitioners an engagement with knowledge is needed that moves beyond translation and into the co-creation of new ideas. Impact is therefore brought about by a disruption of, and challenge to thinking engendered by an approach to management education that we term relational.

Keywords: Impact; business schools; management education; practitioners; scholarship; generative mechanisms.

Introduction

In this paper, we offer a new characterisation of the way in which business school researchers can deliver impact upon the practices of organisations and managers. In doing so, we critique current thinking and practice that positions the research paper as the most appropriate and important unit of analysis by which to measure the excellence of research and its impact (Aguinis et al., 2014). We make a case for widening the terms on which research impact is understood and assessed. This new understanding incorporates approaches to management education that engage practitioners and lead to changes in management practice and it builds on the work of Antonacopoulou (2008; 2010) who warned of the dangers of neglecting the centrality of our teaching and learning practices as an integral aspect of the impact our scholarship delivers. We first of all consider the relevance debate and the apparent gulf between management researchers and the dominance of the highly starred and highly cited journal paper as the unit of analysis of academic performance. From there, we problematize research impact and challenge the notion of a ‘gap’ between researchers and practitioners and propose that the double hurdle (Pettigrew, 1997) cannot be negotiated by a single piece of writing. Increased impact may be derived through our teaching of managers and we reflect on the original intentions of UK business schools and how they set out to educate practitioners. Drawing on these ideas, we position all students as current or potential practitioners and explain the rationale behind this, building on a broad notion of scholarship, set out by Boyer (1990). Our contribution brings together Boyer’s notion of scholarship with Denyer et al’s (2008) CIMO logic in a theoretical framework to argue that *relational management education* creates the generative mechanisms for the co-production of knowledge and impact. We provide examples from business school teaching to illustrate this framework and reflect on the opportunities and challenges that the operationalisation of such a framework would

offer. Finally, we call for further empirical research to explicate the process of impact, to develop deeper understandings of management theory in action through educational practice.

Management Research and Practice

Practitioners still appear to find our research irrelevant, untranslatable and unusable (Holmstrom et al., 2009). We illustrate this point with the following short anecdote:

In 2012, a small, innovative management consultancy approached us with an intriguing idea for research-practitioner collaboration. The consultancy wanted to differentiate itself in a crowded market by using the latest management research from a leading business school. To trial the idea, we suggested that they use a high-profile publication from our research group that had recently been published in the Academy of Management Review. They translated the findings from the paper for their clients by modifying an existing business process improvement framework. This planned partnership appeared to be win-win; they would have an enhanced consultancy product and better financial returns and our research would demonstrate impact. But then the consultants surprised the academics. To partner, the consultants wanted the university to pay an annual retainer of £35,000 to review our publications and determine their potential for their consultancy. They did not consider other benefits for their practice. The proposed partnership between the consultancy and the research group did not materialize.

This incident led us to two observations about business schools and scholarship; first, that academics' preoccupation with high quality, multi-starred research outputs in the form of

journal papers is shared by very few outside the academy. This is a view shared by Aguinis et al (2014) who call for a conceptualisation of impact that takes account of the views of a broad constituency of stakeholders rather than merely using citations as a proxy. Business school academics have criticised each other for being too concerned with journal rankings and their academic papers' citation counts (Aguinis et al., 2014; Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Nicolai and Seidl, 2010; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). Citations in other academic papers are often used to determine the impact of academic research, and to establish institutional quality and prestige (Aguinis et al., 2012; Judge et al., 2007). Such a reductionist approach considers only one stakeholder, other academics, and risks the credibility of the academic research community (Aguinis et al., 2014). Our second observation is that the intellect and experience required to translate the research into a useful and applicable form is valued more highly than that required for its original creation.

However, there is evidence to suggest that research in business schools can positively influence the practices of organisations (Harreld et al., 2007; Tushman and O'Reilly III, 2007; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). Pfeffer and Fong argue that "the research capabilities, and particularly the rigorous thinking and theoretical grounding that characterizes business school scholars and their research, actually offer an advantage over the casual empiricism and hyping of the latest fad that characterizes much, although not all, of the research that comes out of nonacademic sources" (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002: 93). This view encapsulates the value business schools could provide to improve organisational practices and performance, in contrast to that offered by consultants. Whilst we might be disdainful of consultants and practitioners who overlook the necessity of rigour in research, we also undervalue the skill needed to make research credible, understandable and applicable for their clients (Tushman and O'Reilly III, 2007).

Much has been written about the limited influence of business school research on practice, and Wensley (2011) provides a history of the Relevance Debate. Thorpe and Rawlinson recently evaluated the role of UK business schools in driving innovation and growth (Thorpe and Rawlinson, 2014). Their contemporary picture aligns with Pfeffer and Fong (2002) and the related policy document (Thorpe and Rawlinson, 2013) included recommendations that touched on both research and teaching. We argue that these two core elements of academic practice have been viewed as separate and disconnected activities and that they should be more closely linked (Burke and Rau, 2010). We suggest that management education has the potential to create the generative mechanisms (Denyer et al., 2008) that make our work have a greater impact on the practitioner world.

Problematizing Research Impact

Over the past ten years, the language of engagement with practitioners (or, more precisely, the lack of it) has reflected and reinforced the separation between business schools and managers. The literature speaks of the research/practice ‘divide’ (Empson, 2013), the scholar-practitioner ‘gap’ (Cohen, 2007) and the ‘chasm’ between the production and dissemination of research (Rynes, 2007b). Rasche and Behnam (2009) point out that the relevance debate is mistakenly premised on a linear understanding of the relationship between knowledge and practice and numerous metaphors have been created to explain how we might solve such a problem. For example, Thorpe et al (2011) write about needing a ‘chain’ of activity to connect business schools with management practice whereas others describe a ‘bridge’ (Hodgkinson and Rousseau, 2009) that is required to connect the two ‘tribes’ (Gulati, 2007). Furthermore, the relationship is viewed as a knowledge-giving process that is uni-directional and transactional (MacIntosh et al., 2012). There is also a sense that practitioners have

unreasonable expectations of academics and that they ‘demand simplistic solutions to organizational problems’ (Butler et al., 2015: 738). Put in its extreme form, the situation is one of a naïve or stupid manager needing instruction from wise, but irrelevant academics.

Whilst extending the metaphor of a gap between academics and practitioners, Bartunek and Rynes (2014) frame it differently, referring to a series of tensions and paradoxes that underpin the relationship. Instead of choosing one side of the gap or the other, the paradoxes and dialectics inherent in it become a source of learning and inquiry. This requires a more nuanced understanding of the ‘gap’, where one side cannot ‘trump’ the other (Bartunek and Rynes, 2014: 1195). This dialectical tension is also emphasized by Empson (2013) although her writing describes the identity crisis she experienced when moving between her academic context and the professional services firms she worked with. If we were to view the differences between the two sites of practice as a source of learning then this may result in academics and practitioners asking better questions of each other within the context of a mutually beneficial dialogue. This moves us towards a notion of a more collaborative and equal relationship both between academics and practitioners and between research and teaching in business schools and to view the question of impact differently.

Most debates on relevance take the research project (or similar unit of research output) as their focus. Pettigrew’s influential metaphor of the “double hurdle” (1997) implies that each piece of research should result in two outputs: production of high quality academic writing, and relevance for users beyond the academy (see also Starkey and Madan, 2001). How management research might achieve these dual goals has attracted attention from leading scholars. There have been special editions of journals devoted to the subject (e.g. Hodgkinson, 2001; Rynes, 2007a; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; MacIntosh et al., 2012), along with edited volumes (Mohrman and Lawler III, 2011). It appears to be a recurrent theme in

the annual address by the President of the Academy of Management (e.g. Hambrick, 1994; Rousseau, 2006; van de Ven, 2002).

We argue that achieving the “double hurdle” is too much for a single piece of research in the form of a single journal paper (the current unit of analysis). Academic journals’ rigorous processes of review ensure that publications articulate a clear contribution to academic thinking. To expect that this same work could immediately be turned convincingly to matters of practical import is too optimistic (Holmstrom et al., 2009). Alternatively, practical problem-solving work conducted by academics might be insufficiently novel to contribute to academic debates in leading journals. Instead of seeking dual outputs from a piece of research, we could adopt a more reflexive position on this challenge and examine what our scholarship in the round brings to our pursuit of impact. What makes us impactful as academics rather than looking at the research output alone? We suggest that research work should not be judged (in respect to impact) in isolation from the numerous other activities of academics: teaching, policy-work, consulting, institution-building and our academic administrative responsibilities.

Widening the scope of the impact agenda

Whilst the relevance debate is broad and encompasses a wide range of activities that relate to the way in which academia engages with the world (Wensley, 2009; Thorpe et al., 2011), research impact is understood and measured in narrow terms. Many measurements and incentives focus on citations (Aguinis et al., 2014) or journal lists (Willmott, 2011) as a way to determine the importance and value of the research or uses an experienced panel of academics to determine quality. This evaluation of impact involves considering to what extent a research paper has brought about change beyond academic peers and focuses on

research papers rather than a holistic assessment of university activity. For example in the case of the UK Research Excellence Framework, impact case studies must demonstrate how a change in practice or policy or thinking originated from particular, specified academic papers that were written by academics. No particular type of impact or research is prioritised (Thorpe et al., 2011). It may be that academics seek papers for the exercise that retrospectively relate to their institution's best examples of impactful work.

One of the consequences of exclusively identifying "research" as the origin of an academic's impact, is that attempts to improve academic-practitioner links are normally couched in relation to research activity and the academic paper lies at the centre of this activity. We propose a particular approach to management education as an alternative to this view building on Burke and Rau's (2010) view that it is important to educate practitioners to conduct and value research. One way to overcome the 'research-practice' gap is for academics to better engage with practitioners or find ways to address practitioners' problems in meaningful ways (Paton et al., 2014; Vermeulen, 2007). Teaching can also play a role in stimulating research questions and interests during the process of preparing teaching materials and delivering courses (Becker and Kennedy, 2005; Burke and Rau, 2010; Kaplan, 1989).

The university is sometimes portrayed as a space beyond daily demands, where practitioners are able to engage with deep issues and underlying assumptions involved in their work (Paton et al., 2014; Chia, 1996). Paton et al. insist that executive education must "not merely operate in a 'problem-solving' mode offering what executives 'want' or even what they perceive they need" (Paton et al., 2014). Instead they propose that executive education programmes should engage managers in new ways of thinking about their challenges although this may lead to a discomforting or disruptive experience for the practitioner-learners. In this way the academic-

practitioner/learner hierarchy is dismantled (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Reynolds and Vince, 2004) and the interaction between practitioners and academics creates a space where both groups can reflexively and collaboratively question issues (Cunliffe, 2002) and therefore learn from each other (Paton et al., 2014). These approaches value the experiences of the practitioner. They also do not relate to a single piece of academic research, but instead depend on academics who are able to pose questions and offer intellectual stimulation from a range of disciplines, not just standard business theories, or based on a particular publication.

Management education needs to move beyond an instrumental and technical solutions teaching approach to better foster critical thinking (Reynolds and Vince, 2004) and alternative ways to reevaluate (Paton et al., 2014). For this to happen, our understanding of relevance and impact needs to move beyond the research outputs of research projects and instead focus on the academic individual. We acknowledge that there are many ways in which academics are impactful, and engage beyond their academic peer group, such as consultancy and collaborative research. Here, we specifically focus on how academics impact on practice through management education.

Practitioners and Scholarship

Before we go on to discuss our specific approach to management education, we now identify whom these practitioners that we write about actually are. King and Learmonth (2015) point out that the literature has a tendency to assume all impactful engagement is aimed at senior managers, rather than practitioners more broadly. Empson (2013) exemplifies this in her discussion of work with boards and the notion that she needs to change into a business suit to enter their world. The apparently inexorable truth that academics and practitioners are distant and disconnected from each other has not always been so widely

accepted and we propose a broader view of practitioners that connects to the original intentions of UK business schools. The Franks Report (Franks, 1963) and the Robbins Report (Robbins, 1963) both recommended that new British business schools of high quality and in the US tradition be established (Engwall and Danell, 2011) with a significant proportion of the schools' original funding being provided by practitioners in the shape of the Foundation for Management Education. Designed from the outset to enjoy considerable autonomy and to be a genuine partnership between the university and business, the first two business schools were located at London University (in association with the London School of Economics, Imperial College and the University of London) and at Manchester University. Staff at these business schools were interested in understanding how managers learn, prompted by the schools' close engagement with the so-called industrialists of the day. This was particularly the case at Manchester Business School, where considerable investment was made in studying management education and development, both in developing management pedagogy and in understanding the content and processes of the management role. This approach became known as the 'Manchester Method' (Wilson, 1992) and it is now generally described as 'learning by doing' or as a 'practical reflective, live/real project-based approach' (Drinkwater et al., 2004). There are obvious connections here to action learning that had been developed in order to base the development of managers on real operational problems (Revans, 1978) during the early 1950's when Reg Revans was Education Director for the UK National Coal Board.

In these early incarnations of business schools, practitioners were central to the mission and activity and there was an explicit intention to provide management education that would raise levels of national economic competitiveness (Augier and March, 2007; Kieser et al., 2015). This was not wholly vocational in nature and designed so that 'educated men' could gain

‘mastery of a field of knowledge, breadth of outlook and the capacity to think’: abilities considered critical to compete on a global stage (Nind, 1985). These early ideals have been dissipated in that we do not define our current undergraduate and postgraduate students as ‘practitioners’ because practitioners are perceived to be senior managers who exist in their own physical and paradigmatic space. However, if we recognize our former, current and future students of business and management as practitioners, then it is possible to take a broader view of the community with which we are trying to connect and the sense of separation and isolation is diminished. For most management academics, students are a feature of daily life – our ‘bread and butter’ in that we rely in no small measure on the income that they generate for our professional existence. Viewed in this way, it becomes more difficult to cast the practitioner as the ‘other’ (Empson, 2013).

Once students are recognised as practitioners, this also changes the nature of what counts as impact, by including what was previously compartmentalised under the heading of ‘teaching’. Impact therefore becomes achievable through both research and teaching in addition to the more recognizable consultancy and executive education activities and we extend Antonacopoulou’s (2009) conceptualisation of impactful management scholarship to include all of these activities rather than the contrived categories that currently exists.

Notions of scholarship and scholarly work are generally presumed, both in day-to-day language and in the management literature, to refer solely to research activities. Boyer (1990), however, defines four distinct but inter-related aspects of scholarship: discovery, integration, application and teaching. He proposes an inclusive view of these intellectual functions; the scholarship of discovery encompasses traditional academic research activity, application involves a process of applying research to solve problems, integration as making

connections across disciplines and teaching reflects the conventional view of the lecturer. Central to Boyer's thesis is that research is, wrongly, valued more than teaching. He encourages universities to understand how excellent teaching is underpinned by true scholarship (understood in terms of his four categories). There are various conceptualisations of this 'teaching-research nexus' (Horta et al., 2012) or even teaching, research, scholarship and consultancy nexus (Grant and Wakelin, 2009). Efforts to link the two are generally subsumed under the somewhat vague heading of research-led teaching.

Trigwell and Shale (2004), pick up Boyer's theme of the unwarranted primacy of research in explanations of superior academic practice. They distinguish between two academic tribes; those that value research and those that value teaching. This division is unhelpful because it suggests it is impossible for academics to be good at both and that they must choose between two divergent paths. As Brew and Boud (1995: 268) point out, essentially both research and teaching are concerned with learning. In rejecting this artificial separation between research and other academic activities, including teaching, we offer an alternative argument to Butler et al. (2015: 742) who call for 'a legitimacy for scholars who wish to refrain from practitioner engagement altogether.' By highlighting researcher impact (or better still, academic impact) rather than research impact, and in our broad conceptualization of the practitioner body, scholarship encompasses all four of Boyer's (Boyer, 1990) functions and views impact in the round rather than attempting to dissect academic work into discrete measurable and fundable units.

Scholarship with Impact

There is an acceptance that the community does not effectively engage with practitioners because of the inadequate translation of theory into accessible and usable language. Rasche

and Behnam (2009), adopting a systems perspective, propose that the relevance debate is based on the false assumption that the two domains of science and practice would be able to effectively communicate with each other if only the appropriate means were to be found and applied. Conversely, they argue that communication is ultimately determined through understanding rather than the initial utterance and that no matter what the speaker (researcher) is trying to communicate, it is up to the listener (the practitioner) to decide how it is understood. They counter the argument that academics should make their writing more accessible to practitioners by stating that user-friendly writing changes ‘the nature of the argumentation’ (Rasche and Behnam, 2009: 248). The translation and application of research therefore involves ‘an active reconstruction’, on the part of the practitioner, of the practices that can be informed by research knowledge (ibid: 247). This reconstruction leads to an ‘irritation’ or disruption of current thinking that subsequently leads to the creation of ‘practical fictions’ that create relevance for managers. They propose that the role of academics is to help practitioners to develop the competences required to create these ‘fictions’ and suggest that the means through which we should foster these skills is constructive dialogue (Kieser and Nicolai, 2005).

Bartunek (2007) uses Boyer’s scholarship of integration to propose such an approach in which ‘academic-practitioner conversations and mutual relationships happen as a matter of course’ (ibid., p.1330). This emphasises the importance of ‘pathos’ in making an impact through scholarship and, in particular, how emotions evoked in scholarly writing affect how others respond to it. This notion of touching practitioners and moving them to act as a result of engaging with research is also apparent in some forms of teaching. Chia and Holt (2008: 472) propose ‘knowledge-by-representation’ whereby management educators enthuse and inspire learners and ‘evoke their sensitivities’ in an engaged form of learning that eschews

detachment; Cunliffe (2004: 424) writes about students being ‘struck’ by ideas and moments that promote reflexive insight and significant learning.

We have chosen to use the word ‘relational’ to describe this approach to management education. Others have described similar approaches as ‘dialectically mediated’ (Raelin, 2007), ‘critically reflexive’ (Cunliffe, 2004) ‘Mastering Business Action’ (Antonacopoulou, 2008) and ‘dialogic’ (Beech et al., 2010). We conceptualise relational management education interventions as involving an engagement with theory as a means to inform practice and vice-versa, reflexive questioning and the consequent development and enactment of action strategies. The ‘relations’ that are emphasised in these approaches emerge from the interaction of learners with the research itself, with academics in the classroom and between learners themselves to create a community of inquiry (Raelin, 2009).

Bartunek (2007) invites us to ‘Imagine a future in which academic-practitioner conversations and mutual relationships happen as a matter of course’. In a re-framed view of impact, this reflects most academics’ present circumstances rather than some idealised future, because most of us have contact with students on a regular basis. We would engage with students in the same way that we currently approach research or partnerships with practitioners; with anticipation that we will learn something from the process, rather than simply imparting knowledge, and that new knowledge will be created through the engagement. Beech et al. (2010) however, counsel for caution during dialogues between academics and practitioners as many of them remain self-defeating as they unwittingly promulgate a hierarchical separation between the two communities. However Vince asserts that whilst power relations, or anxiety may pervade learning in such situations, they can provide an opportunity for criticality and exploration of one’s position and should not be avoided (2001). Engagement, handled sensitively, should be framed as if between equals as they enable dialogues that “*generate resonances and ongoing ripples*” (Beech et al., 2010: 1364). These resonances are created

through the generative mechanisms of relational management education; the ripples are the impact.

This changes the role of the academic from didactic instructor, to co-producer, mentor or learning set facilitator; ultimately a role that positions the scholar alongside the practitioner in the co-production of knowledge in a community of inquirers. This type of management education intervention provides the opportunity for individual reflection or organisational change that serves to challenge habitual behaviour (Argyris and Schon, 1974) and is often brought about by considering practical problems and personal, reflexive questioning on the part of the practitioner (Letiche and Van Hattem, 2000).

A CIMO framework for management education with impact

Building on these ideas of academic-practitioner conversations, stirring emotions and the active reconstruction of knowledge into an understandable and useable form, we position management education as taking place in the context of three of Boyer's (1990) four domains of scholarship and as an intervention within the context of "CIMO-logic" (Denyer et al., 2008). This logic states that for a generalisable class of Contexts (C), by using a particular Intervention (I) it is possible to enable a generative Mechanism (M), to achieve an Outcome (O). We adopt this logic to consider the general *context* of a business school academic engaged in scholarship of all forms. Management education, inherent in all forms of scholarship apart from the pure research category of 'discovery' (Boyer, 1990) represents a key *intervention*, which by means of the *generative mechanisms* of co-production helps realise impact *outcomes*. A generative mechanism is described as 'the mechanism that in a certain context is triggered by the intervention' (Denyer et al., 2008: 397). Here we propose that the mechanism that is triggered by a *relational* management education intervention is to position learners as co-producers of knowledge. The consequence of this is that research and

theory become useful and usable beyond the classroom and practitioners engage with it in their current or future work to guide their thinking and their action.

We now unpack the mechanisms of co-production by invoking Boyer's scholarship categories as *contexts* of academics' engagement with practitioners. Although this paper is not primarily concerned with the scholarship of discovery, we note that collaborative forms of research with practitioners can initiate the kind of co-production mechanism we discuss in connection to relational management education (cf. discussion of Mode 2 research in Huff and Huff 2001). The mechanism of co-production in the context of "Integration" involves developing a more comprehensive understanding of research findings through academic-practitioner conversations (cf. Bartunek, 2007). Where efforts at the "Application" of academic knowledge are concerned, then co-production proceeds through the active reconstruction (cf. Rasche and Behnam, 2009) of such knowledge on the part of practitioners. Finally in Boyer's scholarship of "Teaching" the inspiring of practitioners to think and act anew (cf. Chia and Holt, 2008) is the key mechanism. The CIMO framework linking scholarship, management education and impact is presented in Figure 1 and uses illustrative examples of interventions and outcomes that we offer in the next section.

Figure 1. Scholarship, relational management education and impact: a CIMO framework

Contextual category of Scholarship (Boyer, 1990)	Illustrative Intervention	Generative Mechanism	Illustrative Outcome
Discovery	Mode 2, collaborative research	Framing problem and developing researching-practitioner relationship to co-produce knowledge	Academic paper <i>and</i> changed workplace practices or producers.
Integration	Executive education programme with Managers	Framing wicked problems, guided by academic-practitioner conversations.	Action to achieve a gender-balanced workforce in the security industry.

Application	DBA research project	Active reconstruction by practitioners of academic concepts through discussions with the supervisory team and action in the workplace.	Successful change in customer service performance.
Teaching	Innovation management course for scientist-innovators	Inspiring a sense of inquiry about the organisation of innovation work.	Progress with a new product development project.

Examples of Scholarship in Practice

The three vignettes below are examples of relational scholarship in the form of both research and teaching (Bartunek, 2007; Chia and Holt, 2008), the creation of practical fictions (Rasche and Behnam, 2009) and the way in which generative mechanisms (Denyer et al, 2008) co-produce new ways of understanding and inquiring.

The Scholarship of Integration: Critical action learning with HR Managers

One of us was recently involved in an action learning project, commissioned by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, aimed at encouraging HR managers to critically engage with a set of ethical principles, developed by the CIPD as part of their Profession for the Future project. The research reports that form the basis for the intervention, written by academics not involved in the teaching (CIPD, 2015a; CIPD, 2015b), review the philosophy literature that deals with ethics and identify a number of ‘lenses’ through which ethical judgements about the relationship between an organisation and its people can be viewed, based on data from 10,000 respondents. The research is aimed at promoting a debate about ethics and professionalisation in the HR community, poses five key questions to be considered about how HR should be practiced and is designed to ‘help practitioners to recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas’ (CIPD, 2015a: 2).

Twelve HR Managers, at various levels of seniority joined two action learning sets. They were given the practitioner-focused report (CIPD, 2015a) and asked to read it before the first meeting and to bring a work-based problem or issue to work on within the project. A number of other research papers were also given as reading between sessions and themes and ideas from the CIPD's publications and other work were introduced to the learning set conversations during the meetings. The majority of participants reported that two months after the learning set meetings had ended that they continued to implement actions that they had committed themselves to take.

The interviews subsequently carried out with participants highlighted that the dialogic nature of action learning had helped them to engage with how ideas presented in the research could have an impact on their practice. This was achieved by encouraging them to frame questions to each other on the basis of the ethical principles, despite this feeling rather contrived at times. They talked in these interviews about their relationship with the research which they found 'heavy and 'hard-going', with others in the group where there was a need to build up trust and with the process of action learning facilitated by an academic resulting in a number of different levels of engagement from a process-driven approach to a deeply emotional experience. They all reported a heightened consciousness of professionalism and ethics in their day-to-day practice but only a small number of them had shared the document with others and used the executive summary as an aide-memoire for themselves. It was not the research *per se* that had created the changes in practice, despite it being tailored to a practitioner audience, but the conversations instigated and led by the academic. In effect, action learning as the intervention, created the generative mechanism of shared inquiry that led to action and an impact on practice. Several 'ripples' of impact have subsequently been

reported by participants, including a project that is addressing the under-representation of women in the security industry across the UK and Ireland.

The Scholarship of Application: Theory into practice

Our second illustrative example is taken from the experience of a DBA (Doctor of Business Administration) student. In such professional doctorate programmes, students are provided with the scholarly means to realise practitioner outcomes, and in doing so the student is required to make sense of academic research and theory within their own context. One of our students, a senior executive in a Kenyan bank initiated a change programme in customer services as part of his DBA thesis project. In this endeavour he identified that the practice of leadership within the change programme and beyond was key to its success, and sought to make use of academic literature on distributed leadership. However, he argued the application of such Western literature to an African context was not a simple process:

“Community life [in Kenya] was quite structured with systems that connected all aspects of life among the living and the departed members of the community. The ancestors who were long dead members of the community played and continue to play an active role and influence the way of life amongst community members...I offer the view that the way leadership is enacted in Kenyan organisations is influenced by this contextual reality that may not be documented in current leadership literature from the western context”. (quotation from Senior Executive of a Kenyan Bank).

In discussion with his colleagues and his academic supervisors, he reconstructed established notions of distributed leadership to include a sense of distribution beyond the current community of employees; and spoke to their shared cultural traditions. This perspective informed the way in which the customer service improvement programme was led and

organised. He explained how this application of a re-interpreted theory also impacted on his overall practice and, in his own words, how it makes him stand out ‘as a unique CEO in my world’

The Scholarship of Teaching: Fostering Practitioner Inquiry

When seeking to foster a spirit of inquiry during engagements with practitioners, the impact of academic research may not be only understood in terms of the substantive content of that research. The opportunity for practitioners to become familiar with the *practices* of research is also a possibility. In an innovation management programme leading to a Postgraduate Certificate award for medical technologists, we sought to foster not only their engagement with management research, but also a climate of inquiry about their own management practice. Making progress towards realising an impact from the course readings involved exchanges in which we sought to understand more about the nature of innovation work at the technology centre, and the scientists learnt ways of inquiring into their own innovation practices. For example, one innovation professional seeking to develop an instrument that could be used in a surgical situation thought it might be useful to observe an operation. He was surprised to discover there was a social research method called “ethnography”, and familiarization of some of the literature on the subject allowed him to make more effective use of his time in the hospital. He later reported that “an important and previously neglected find was how the most important people for the success or failure of the [instrument] are theatre nurses”.

The course in which these scientists participated involved: specified literature readings, self-study, “testing” management ideas in the work place, and critical reflection of all of this activity; all under the guidance of a business school tutor. By these means, we sought to

create a learning space in which a role for management literature emerged quite naturally. In doing so we fostered a spirit of management inquiry within the practitioners themselves. It is also important to note that the research from which practical benefits were realised was not simply our own; in fact it was more likely to be others' research and reflects the accumulated character of scientific knowledge.

Impactful scholarship in practice

We have offered three illustrations of relational management education, each of them offering a different approach to generating the co-production of knowledge and shared learning. Contextualised within the scholarship of integration, the critical action learning series invited practitioners to problematise 'wicked' issues that they faced in their professional and leadership roles. The critical questions inherent in the action learning approach coupled with an engagement with research underpinning the professionalism project, promoted discussion and sparked new insights that ultimately led to action and impact.

In our second example, contextualized within the scholarship of application, practitioners were encouraged to work with concepts and theories and through discussion, to recognize the opportunities and constraints to thinking that they represent within a workplace setting; co-production in this instance entailed an active re-construction of established research thinking. In the teaching vignette, learners were presented with management research that provided a focus for inquiry and for informed risk-taking despite the relevance of the papers and ideas initially appearing questionable. Paton et al. (2014) propose that the work of educating practitioners does not start with a particular piece of research in the traditional manner of 'research-led teaching', but instead is based on the academic's ability to introduce practitioners to seemingly irrelevant ideas from a range of disciplines that help them to perceive their organisational challenges differently. Their idea of "relevating" (Paton et al,

2014) becomes only a device to get practitioners thinking anew about their own situations.

These three approaches are similar in that they all relied on relational approaches to teaching and learning and did not attempt to simplify or translate the original research yet the goal of impact was achieved in different ways; by problematising knowledge and practice in the first example, actively reconstructing knowledge in the second and promoting an orientation to inquiry in the third.

In this framework (Figure 1) and through our vignettes, we have illustrated the way in which a disruption of learners' thinking occurs through a combination of reading and reflecting on research related to their practice or their particular problem, coupled with an opportunity to discuss and re-think this knowledge in a way that makes sense to them. Learners are invited to develop complicated understanding (Bartunek et al, 1983) and decide on courses of action that lead to impact that is directly informed by research. The purpose of management education is not to provide easy solutions to intractable problems (Paton et al, 2014); the role of the scholar is to recognize the context in which they are working, to suggest relevant and useful (although not always directly and evidently applicable) research materials and to create an environment in which learners can deconstruct and personalize concepts that go on to tacitly influence their practice. This combination of the research (not necessarily the teacher's own) and the setting and conditions for learning generates the mechanisms for co-production and ultimately impact. This requires a wider and deeper understanding of scholarship than that which currently exists in many business schools.

Based on the original vision of how business schools should strive to make an impact on management practice and ultimately, the success of businesses in general, we argued earlier in this paper for the recognition of all students and learners as practitioners or at least as

proto-practitioners. However, the examples that populate our framework all depict academics working with practicing managers as they are offered from our own experience. There are examples of relational management education approaches that have been implemented with groups of full-time undergraduate students but these are mainly conducted with small groups of students and often take a critical management education approach (see for example Mingers, 2000). Somewhat perversely, the rise in (most notably) undergraduate student numbers appears to have focused our attention on research rather than teaching. Between 1990 and 2013, undergraduate enrolments in US universities grew by 46% (NCES, 2015) and the number of students obtaining a first degree in the UK increased fourfold between 1990 and 2011 (Bolton, 2012). This expansion has forced the separation of research and teaching and, in the UK especially, separate funding streams have emphasised the split. The massification of higher education and the popularity of business schools in particular, has led to large class sizes that, ostensibly at least, do not lend themselves to relational approaches. We propose that creating impact through resonance and co-production within large classes of full time students is possible. The principles of problematising, active reconstruction and an orientation to inquiry all provide ways of engaging students with research and could be used as the basis of enacting impactful pedagogical approaches. The biggest challenge, however, would be in changing the culture of the research star, especially as being an impactful academic in the all-round sense of the term is an equally daunting task.

Conclusions & Implications

In this paper we have problematised current notions of research impact, suggesting they display three inter-related weaknesses: an implicit linearity in the pathway from research to outcomes; an unsustainable burden being placed on the research paper as the sole foundation for impactful initiatives; and a role for practitioners confined to mere recipients of academic

research. We offer a more pluralist view of impact (Agunis et al, 2014) in widening the terms upon which impact involving business school academics is understood and assessed. We conceptualise impact in relation to a community of inquirers engaged in research, scholarship and relational management education and present a framework that extends Boyer's (1990) notions of scholarship, using Denyer et al's (2008) CIMO framework to show how relational management education creates the generative mechanism of co-production, initiated by an irritation to thinking (Rasche and Behnam, 2009) ultimately leading to impact. This offers a broader view of impact than has hitherto been the case, that does not originate uniquely in a focal academic's or group of academics research, but becomes a more distributed concept with origins also possible in teaching programmes, practitioner inquiry, and academic scholarship founded on the original scientific research of others. This opens up the possibility for a wider range of management academics to be impactful rather than solely those involved in producing outstanding papers that lead to impact in the narrow, citation-based terms in which we currently define it. Whilst we are not denying that these papers often represent excellent management research, we have shown here is that it is the combination of a range of research perspectives and outputs, coupled with an engagement with this writing on the part of learners, brought about by relational approaches to learning that eventually leads to significant impact on managers and their organisations.

This proposition runs counter to the current poor standing in business schools of teaching vis-à-vis research (cf. Bennis and O'Toole, 2005), and invites us to take into account the whole gamut of our work. This opens up the possibility for many more of us to become an *impactful academic*. However, we acknowledge that this may create tensions related to the identities academics currently construct through their career-building. For example, Butler et al. (2015) express concern at the potential restrictions to scholarly life as calls for research impact appear ever more mandatory. We share these authors desire to "provide legitimacy

for scholars who wish to refrain from practitioner engagement altogether” (ibid, p. 742), but we do so only in consequence of the narrow terms with which such practitioner engagement has been hitherto presented: the realization of impact directly from research papers. We would not wish the academic writing of any scholar to be ‘out of bounds’ to a practitioner wishing to read it; no more than we would insist all scholars must re-cast that writing for a practitioner audience.

This is a conceptual paper that offers a framework to direct attention for a more holistic evaluation of impactful scholarship and more specifically, the impactful academic. Our discussion has implications and opens up an agenda for further study in three key areas. First, the Scholarship, Relational Management and Impact Framework presented here is illustrative, offering vignettes based on activities at and educational interventions developed at the business school where we work. There would be value in empirical studies that track and further conceptualise the extent and form of the co-production of management knowledge. The aim should be to identify the transformation of management practice based on specific forms of intervention, across different institutions, organisations and sites of practice. Such studies are likely to reveal new and innovative generative mechanisms for more productive approaches to management education.

Second, understanding the relationship between the different aspects of scholarship (discovery, integration, application and teaching) and how new assemblages of these activities, materials, practices and forms of expertise interact to solve problems, engage learners and transform practice in different settings would provide further insight. Such studies might necessarily be longitudinal ethnographies of management learners or managers in wild (cf. Hutchins 1995) or individuals thrown into management roles and crossing educational, management and institutional boundaries as they go about their work.

One such group that seem worthy of study in this way are DBA candidates. The challenges faced by DBAs and their supervisors are widely cited (Erwee 2004; Ruggeri Bareham and Bourner 2001; Banerjee and Morley, 2014; Anderson et al, 2015) and this would be an excellent starting point for such an inquiry. Such studies may lead to radical rethinking of what works well in the circulation, presentation, translation and co-production of impactful management knowledge.

Finally, not discussed in this paper but increasingly of significance in the management literature is the emergent performativity agenda that explores how theories (mostly economic) are put into practice and transformed through their practice (cf. Callon 2007). We could do much more to study how management theories are used pragmatically to ‘move things forward’, to make judgements about what to do next and to guide what information is seen as valuable and why (Mason, Kjellberg and Hagberg 2014). Such studies might help us generate deeper understandings of how managers use management theories and concepts in their practice to stabilize realities so that actors can generate at least partially shared understandings of what needs to be done, and coordinate their activities (cf. Gond et al. 2015). Such shared understandings, incorporating divergence and debate need to be based on a willingness to understand the roles of researchers and managers in new ways such that what is valued and how it relates to the different identities is better understood (Beech et al, 2010). This seems particularly pertinent to growing our understanding of the impactful academic.

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